

# PERSONAL LANDSCAPE

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HUGH GORDON PORTEUS

BERNARD SPENCER

TERENCE TILLER

VOLUME 2

PART 4

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EDITORS : LAWRENCE DURRELL, ROBIN FEDDEN, BERNARD SPENCER

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## A CHANGE OF LANDSCAPE.

When we were relatively cut off from England, and the term of our stay in the Middle East seemed likely to be indefinite, there was an evident place for a local verse periodical. *Personal Landscape* was accordingly started in January 1942. For three years it has provided a vehicle, the only one available in English, for serious poets and critics in the Middle East. It has also, at a time when propaganda colours all perspectives, emphasized those “personal landscapes”, which lie obstinately outside national and political frontiers.

Today with the end of the European war almost in sight, poets, like others, are beginning to leave the Middle East, and for those who remain there is no longer literary isolation. With the improvement in communications, a manuscript reaches London in a week, and periodicals come out here in about the same time. Soon in fact there will no longer be any real need for an English verse periodical in this part of the world. For this reason the present number of *Personal Landscape* is to be the last. We prefer to die at meridian. An anthology from *Personal Landscape*, appearing shortly in England, will bring together much of the best work that we have published in the last three years.

THE EDITORS.

## BEHAVIOUR OF FISH IN AN EGYPTIAN TEA-GARDEN.

As a white stone draws down the fish  
she on the seafloor of the afternoon  
draws down mens' glances and their cruel wish  
for love. Slyly red lip on the spoon



slips-in a morsel of ice-cream : her hands  
white as a milky stone, white submarine.  
fronds, sink with spread fingers, lean  
along the table, carmined at the ends.

A cotton magnate, an important fish  
with great eyepouches and a golden mouth  
through the frail reefs of furniture swims out  
and idling, suspended, stays to watch.

A crustacean old man clamped to his chair  
sits coldly near her and might see  
her charms through fissures where the eyes should be  
or else his teeth are parted in a stare.

Captain on leave, a lean dark mackerel  
lies in the offing, turns himself and looks  
through currents of sound. The flat-eyed flatfish sucks  
on a straw, staring from its repose, laxly.

And gallants in shoals swim up and lag  
circling and passing near the white attraction ;  
sometimes pausing, opening a conversation ;  
fish pause so to nibble or tug.

Now the ice-cream is finished, is  
paid for. The fish swim off on business  
and she sits alone at the table, a white stone  
useless except to a collector, a rich man.

Keith DOUGLAS.

### ENGLISH GOVERNESSES IN ATHENS.

Spiteful grey maidens of Athena's city,  
Which should you move, our anger or our pity?  
That you are ugly, old and poor, is true—  
But were the Harpies better-off than you?

Robert LIDDELL.

## ROMAN PORTRAITS.

There has never been a naked face;  
perhaps ghosts or angels have it, or the dead  
whose images outlast them : but bare-eyed,  
the mouth only a mouth, the lines untied,  
is not a living face : faces wear moods for dress.

The mask, its artifice of power or grace,  
thought led by the masker across wood  
metal or paper, is the shell of a mood  
stripped off and living : the mask does not hide,  
but chooses limits, being chosen to express.

I have seen the lineaments of a place  
unmask suddenly as a rising bird;  
a torn-out page : so human faces could  
lose their bright meaning plaster, and have died  
into an echo's firm impersonal absences.

These masks and statues of an ancient race,  
expressive bandages for limb and head,  
living on history, like a fallen god,  
were greater than the hollowness they hid.  
What is it now speaks through their mouths, looks  
through their eyes?

Terence TILLER.

## ANATOLIA.

### THIRD RECITATIVE <sup>(1)</sup>.

At the end of summer forests burn.  
On that August of 1922 all Anatolia was ablaze.  
First in Afion-Karahissar  
The soldiers throw away their arms.  
The generals are left with field-glass in hand.  
The clamouring Turks pounce upon them in the thickets.  
Gold braid is torn off and distributed.  
No sentries anywhere. The scattered regiments run to the sea.  
The railway-lines sink with the weight.  
Men stick to the lorries like blight,  
And the wounded yell from inside tents  
That they be not abandoned.  
Bandaged bodies crawl.  
The Greeks run ahead slaying the Turks,  
And the Turks run after them slaying the Christians.  
Wherever they stand blood drips off their heels,  
A double carpet -  
One land, does she pity either side?  
The Turks hold the mountain caves :  
Mountains always admit those nearest of kin.  
Christians fall upon the shore  
Like quail, their souls upon their lips.  
The face of the country has changed -  
Trees bowing with hanged men,  
On the waters float women's hair,  
And the villages burn slowly by the roads  
Like abandoned chalk-kilns.  
Kemal sent word to his troops  
To fight till the soil was clear  
Of the wheel marks of the giaour  
Then he would cede them as a bounty  
Smyrna, and her dog of a bishop.

<sup>(1)</sup> The first and second *Recitatives* appeared in earlier numbers of *Personal Landscape*.



So all the Christian-haters follow the scent,  
Kurds and Laz and the tight-girdled Tsetes,  
The gypsies that sleep with bears,  
And before the sorrowful dust of the Greeks  
Had settled, they fell upon the city.

Now is overturned the order of the inanimate  
Objects on which life hangs;  
Houses emptied in a morning;  
The owners take away their keys,  
Parting, throw food to the fowls. Yet before night falls  
No more of owner, of fowls or keys.  
The prudent who remained by their belongings  
Were sacrificed before their open chests.  
Soldiers found hidden were tortured.  
The Archbishop Chrisostom was also taken,  
Who would not have his robes put off,  
Preferring the great calamity.  
One by one the elders of Smyrna leave  
In tears, after begging him in vain.  
He was found alone in his chamber when they took him  
To be shamed through the Turkish quarters.  
They pushed him from wall to wall  
They pulled his beard and he quivered  
The Turkish women howling behind grilled windows  
Poured boiling oil upon him.  
At last they lashed him by the legs  
Behind the cart of a Cretan negro,  
Standing up, the negro whipped the horses,  
His head bounced along the cobbled street.  
On that same night fire was set,  
Breaking first in the Armenian quarter,  
By spraying petrol through hoses,  
The Tsetes running behind with blazing torches.  
The ownerless animals are set loose,  
Each kind wailing in its own voice.  
And all the lunatics were carbonised and the bed-ridden



At the Greek Hospital;  
Because of their screams the Tsetes did not stop to loot.  
On digging this quarter.  
Much was found later.  
And on the narrow water-front—  
With fire behind and water before  
The Christians had no place to stoop,  
And standing up, they saw the acts of terror,  
Ducking to avoid  
The swinging swords of the horsemen.  
At the Poonta grave-yard they open the graves  
To hide in, but the Turks at dusk  
Bent over and touching the necks  
Sorted the young from the old women,  
And dragged them out in shame  
Before their parents' eyes.  
They fling their arms round the cypresses.  
The fire burns on for five days,  
Its glaze lighted up the cells of Mount Athos,  
Smoke unstitched the city in darkness  
And when the sun rises,  
There is no more Smyrna in the bay—gone.

Gone the streets with the balconies, the taverns,  
So many churches, the street of Fassoulā.  
Merciful launches alongside the quays  
Have been sunk by the madness of the land.  
At every military cordon men are sorted,  
Hidden valuables are offered in ransom  
And desperate appeals.  
Here lives are parted with one last glance.  
And those that fall in the sea to escape,  
Boys and girls, heading for the battleships,  
Are kept off by sailors with boathooks,  
Scolded in foreign tongues for breaking orders,  
And spoiling the clean paint.  
They sink, marvelling.

Thus the shallow waters are cemented by bodies and bundles  
And in the open, sea-gulls peck at all that floats.  
And the breeze that blows morning and evening  
Became heavy with the evil smell.

Ellie PAPADIMITRIOU.

#### FOUR EPIGRAMS FROM INTERNMENT.

(Camp "4")      And there is a gate that is not guarded  
And an only brother leaning by it  
Under a single young pine  
A single young shadow  
By a Greek sea.

(Keren).      I measure darkness and distance  
Time and all the unknown grasses  
That separate me from Greece.

(Bethlehem).      The coldness of the stone  
The weight of iron  
We measured leaning  
Against this prison window  
In this prison for the free.

(Camp "4").      Now in this camp, o father  
I have become very patient  
So often you shamed my impatience  
But you would be hurt, my father  
By the patience of this camp.

Ellie PAPADIMITRIOU.

CONON IN ALEXANDRIA.

Ash-heap of four cultures,  
Bounded by Mareotis, a salt lake,  
On which the winter rain rings and whitens,  
In the waters, stiffens like eyes.

I have been four years bound here :  
A time for sentences by the tripod :  
Prophesies by those who were born dead.  
Or who lost their character and kept their taste.

A solitary presumed quite happy,  
Writing those interminable whining letters,  
On the long beaches dimpled by the rain,  
Tasting the island wind

Blown against wet lips and shutters out of Rhodes.  
I say "presumed" but would not have it otherwise.

\*  
\* \*

Steps go down to the port  
Beyond the Pharos. O my friends,  
Surely these nightly visitations  
Of islands in one's sleep must soon be over?

I have watched beside the others,  
But always the more attentive, the more exacting :  
The familiar papers on a table by the bed :  
The plate of olives and the glass of wine.



You would think thoughts so long rehearsed  
Like the friction of dry ropes in the mind  
Would cease to lead me where in Greece  
The almond candles and the statues burn.

The moon's cold seething fires over this white city  
Through four Februaries have not forgotten.

\*  
\* \*

Tonight the stars press idly on the nerves  
As in a cobweb, heavy with dispersal :  
Points of dew in a universe too large,  
Too formal to be more than terrible.

“There are sides of the self  
One can seldom show. They live on and on  
In an emergency of anguish always  
Waiting for parents in another”.

Would you say that later, reading  
Such simple propositions the historian  
Could be found to say : “The critic  
In her made a humour of this passion

The equations of a mind too conscious of ideas,  
Fictions, not kisses crossing the water between them”?

\*  
\* \*

And later Spring, which compels these separations  
Will but define you further as she dies  
In flowers downless and pure as Portia's cheek,  
Interrupting perhaps the conversation of friends

On terraces where the fountains plane at time,  
To leave this small acid precipitate to memory,  
Of something small, screwed up, and thrown aside  
“Partings like these are lucky. At least they wound”.

And later by the hearth of a philosopher  
Muttering : “The desert, yes, for exiles.  
But its immensity only confines one further.  
Its end seems somehow always in oneself.”

A gown stained at the arm-pits by an acid body.  
A letter unfinished because the ink gave out.

\* \* \*

The lovers you describe as “separating each other  
Further with every kiss”, and your portrait  
Of a man “engaged in bitterly waiting  
For the day when art should become unnecessary”

Were in the style and order; as when you say  
“Freedom alone confines”; but do they show a love,  
Fragmented everywhere by conscience and deceit,  
Ending on this coast of torn-out light-houses?

Or that unmerited and neglected habit,  
That structure that so long informed our growth?  
Questions for a nursery wall—but are they true to these?  
I have passed all day again in what they would call patience,

Not writing, alone in a window, with my flute,  
Having heard from you in one immortal February  
That “Music is only love looking for words”.

Lawrence DURRELL.

IN AN AUCTION ROOM.

How many deaths and partings spilled  
this jumble in an upper room;  
and every chair or mirror filled  
with elbowing and smell of lives :  
the gloom  
of this tall wardrobe stopped the sun  
entering a home; the great brass bed  
stood in its throne-room, and its springs  
and shining arms are crammed like mines  
with regal illness and with love :  
the terrible settee  
with worn red flowers, the table de nuit,  
the picture with the little man  
walking the infinite road  
to a West of gold;  
these have all been (and are to be)  
loves truer than our human mould.  
or desperate walls  
flung up against the shock of things,  
what has no name; or growing old.

Bernard SPENCER.



FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOHN SANDERSON,

MERCHANT, IN EGYPT 1585-1586,

WHEREIN HE RECALLS HIS MIDDLE EAST ACQUAINTANCES.

“Gobo Garaway died with wenching at Sio. Charles Merrell, the whore-monger, shott dead throughe the head, in the way to Alepo, by a janesary shutinge at a pigeon. Envious Barli died a begar at the Grange; Lumbard at London, no lesse; Harman, a knave and a roge; Tient, a knave graver. Midnall the cocould, alive at the Indies. Pate dead at Sidon; W. Aldrich at Modon; Field in the west contry with his froward wife is fadlinge; and Bourne (Davi) with marchandisinge makes much peddling, and now is banckrout and (some say) a cockold”

FROM “PHOENICIAN IMAGES”

Here well the sources, loveliest of all  
The source of love, and some say source of all,  
That seek the way their various ways to sea.  
Some times you may surprise about the spring  
Most aromatic plants, or trembling  
Close by the rough cove, curious Narcissus.  
Peer deeper then, through the transparent fathom  
Where sands run down into the chasm and tomb  
Of every sort of vessel. O reflect  
How underneath the swell and breaking waves  
The current ever changes and deceives  
And each rejected fragment turns again.  
Where History magnified inverted lies  
Or proffers to confound your inventories  
Amazing presents from a fading past.

Past bluffs and issues of the fretted marge  
The tides' asides and gloss disclose the large  
Discursive hand, and grave parentheses—  
For every phase, her distant peregrine  
Emblem of majesty—and ever green  
Past towers tottering, the moonstruck seas.  
Of sporting gods and kingdoms gone, the port  
Hands more than temple down, or crumbling fort  
Though the great mound tell also of their antics.

Hugh Gordon PORTEUS.

### THE POETRY OF CAVAFY.

Alexandria two thousand years ago and the Alexandria of to-day are equally close to Cavafy. He moves with ease in a Hellenistic crowd of degenerate kings, sophists, and rakes, as among the raffish youth that haunt the modern Attarine quarter. From this extraordinary medley and its surroundings, Cavafy draws more than the subject matter of his poetry. His language and thought were also formed by them, for they became part of himself.

“Environment of the house, of the haunts, and of the quarter,  
Which I see and where I walk; for years and years.

I created you in joy and in sorrow  
With many episodes, with many objects.

Together you became a sentiment to me”.

(*In the same Space*, 1929.)

In his earlier poems, dated before 1912, Cavafy used ancient and modern subjects alike to embody a symbolical meaning. Thus *The God Abandons Anthony*, 1911, (already published in E. M. FORSTER'S *Pharos and Pharillon*)

expresses Cavafy's sense of thwarted success and of ominous disaster, which he continually felt lay ahead of him, and which he communicates in so many of his poems. It is the god Hercules, who forsakes Mark Anthony after the battle of Actium. Anthony, conscious of the tragedy which awaits him, is exhorted to face it as Cavafy himself would, undefeated by defeat.

“Do not lament your fortune which at last subsides,  
Your life's work that has failed, your schemes that have proved illusions,  
But like a man long prepared, like a brave man,  
Bid farewell to her, to Alexandria who is departing.

(Translated by Valassopoulos.)

To the same period belongs the curiously ominous poem *The Ides of March*. A warning that negligence often causes the downfall of the great.

“Fear magnificence, O my Soul!  
If you cannot dominate your ambitions  
Follow them tentatively and with caution.  
The more you advance, the more watchful be.

And when you reach your peak, at length a Caesar,  
When you attain the stature of a man of high repute  
Then most beware when you go into the streets,  
A conspicuous ruler with a retinue,  
If out of the crowd there happens to approach you  
Some Artemidorus bearing a letter  
And says in haste : ‘Read this immediately.  
These are important matters which concern you’.  
Do not fail to stop; do not fail to postpone  
Any conversation or duty. Do not fail to put aside  
Those who salute and make obeisance;  
(You can see them later) let even the Senate wait;  
And learn immediately  
The important message of Artemidorus’.



This, like all the poems of Cavafy, transmits a meaning even if its context is unknown; its inner significance is felt even before it is wholly understood.

Certain other poems express this double meaning in a modern setting. These are often descriptions of a state of mind symbolically recounted, the background is the symbol. *Without Heed* deals with the isolation of the mind incapable of human contact.

“Ah when they were building the walls  
Why did I not take heed  
I never heard the sound of masons, nor any other sound  
Unawares they shut me out of the world”

After 1912 Cavafy shed all symbolism. His poems became crisp and disciplined statements. Yet at the same time they remain very personal. Cavafy himself is always there : either as the critical spectator of the events which he describes, or more subjectively in the very texture of the moods and experiences which the poems embody.

He speaks in Myrtias (a Syrian scholar of Alexandria, half pagan half christian). Like Myrtias he runs rather than is run by his personal experiences.

“Strengthened by doctrine and study  
I do not like a coward fear my passions  
My body I shall give to pleasure,  
To the imagined delights,  
To the most daring erotic desires,  
To the sensual impulses of my blood,  
Without fear; for when I so desire it—  
I will have the power, strengthened as I shall be  
By doctrine and study—  
At the crucial moment, again I will find  
My spirit ascetic as before”

(*Those who Risk*, 1911.)

*Return* is more subjective, an exquisitely rendered sensation.

“Return often and possess me  
Loved sensation, return and possess me—  
When the memory of the body awakes  
And an old desire passes through the blood once more;  
And the lips and the skin remember  
And the hands feel as if they touched again.

Return often and possess me at night,  
When the lips and the skin remember”.

(1912.)

Equally sensitively treated are the two following poems, of more romantic quality.

“Raphael—a few verses we ask of you  
For the epitaph of the poet Ammonis  
Something aesthetic and polished.  
You are able to do it, you are the person to write as befits  
The poet Ammonis our own.

Most certainly you will speak of his verse  
But speak also of his beauty  
His delicate beauty we loved.  
Your Greek was always fine and musical  
But now we need your entire craftsmanship,  
Into a foreign tongue our grief and our love are passing.  
Mould your Egyptian sentiments into a foreign tongue.  
Raphael, let your verses be so written  
That they have something of our life in them, you know.  
That the rhythm and the phrasing make obvious  
It is an Alexandrian writing for an Alexandrian”.

(*To Ammonis who died at 29 years old in 610 A. D., 1917.*)

and this gentle poem :

“This room, how well I know it,  
Now it is to let with the one next door  
For business premises. The whole building was turned  
Into offices for agents, merchants, and companies.

Ah this room! How intimate it is—  
Here, by the door is the couch—  
In front of it, a turkish carpet;  
By it the shelf with two yellow vases,  
To the right, oh no across,

A cupboard with a mirror  
In the middle the table, where he wrote;  
And the three straw chairs;  
Beside the window was the bed  
Where we had loved so often.

Somewhere they are all to be found those objects  
Beside the window was the bed,  
The afternoon sun reached to half its length.

At four o'clock in the afternoon we parted  
For only one week: . . . but alas  
That week continued always”.

(*The Afternoon Sun*, 1919.)

It is characteristic of Cavafy to transmit his personal experiences in form of reminiscence whereas his historical poems are written in the present tense. In this way he gives on the one hand an immediacy to events long past, and on the other the authority almost of history to the experiences of his own life.

This curious faculty of absorbing periods so far apart is responsible for Cavafy's ability to bring right before one's eyes remote personages or events, and to realize them as concretely as the scenes of debauchery in the taverns of his quarter, or the sketches of the dubious characters that frequent them.



Events, in his historical poems, move with the topical intensity that the man in the street feels for things that touch him directly.

The quality of Cavafy's imagination is concrete and highly visualised. His poems hang like paintings in the memory. His matter is compressed into the finest verbal economy and the thought or feeling bears in one direction only, hence the intensity concentrated in so small a space. His love poems are certainly not meant for "those clad in grey who speak of morality". They are little known for the same reason. In the following love poem the effect lies largely in the contrast between the sordidness of the surroundings and the passion of the reminiscence.

"It must have been one o'clock in the morning or half-past.

In a corner of the Tavern;

Behind wooden partitions

The place completely empty; excepting for us two.—

A petrol lamp lit it but dimly.

By the door, a waiter exhausted slept.

No one could see us. But already

We were much excited

Incapable of precaution.

Our clothes unfastened

They were not many

For the divine month of July was on fire.

The delight of the flesh, between

The partly open clothes,

The quick uncovering of the flesh

The picture of which has survived

Twenty six years, and now comes

To live in this poem".

(*So that it may Survive*, 1919.)

Whether crude or veiled, emotional or cerebral, whether the direct personal recounting of experience, or experience transmitted in an indirect form, the work of Cavafy traces a development which never loses contact with the expression of his personality. It is at the same time a development controlled by the strictest technical discipline. The hundred and fifty four poems which comprise his life work were the object of years of careful revision and scrutiny. They were kept in a portfolio, Cavafy refusing rigorously to publish them till he had got them to the desired state of perfection, like his own jeweller in the *Shop* :

“Criticising them now he finds them beautiful  
As he had imagined them”

Amy NIMR.

#### KEITH DOUGLAS : AN OBITUARY NOTE.

We wish to express our profound regret for the death in action, during the battle of France, of Keith Douglas who had contributed to several numbers of *Personal Landscape*. As a captain in a tank unit he took part in the Allied advance which followed Alamein, and in the course of it was wounded.

It was in North Africa that he wrote the poems we were fortunate enough to be able to publish, and which are among the small amount of successful verse written by soldiers from the battlefield during the present war. His most remarkable qualities as a poet are his economical use of language for statement (metrical and sound effects are rare), the surprise and force of his images (c. f. *Cairo Jag*, and *Vergissmeinicht*), and the maturity of the ‘pity’ (as for instance in *Enfidaville*). He regarded himself as being in the tradition of Wilfrid Owen.

A volume of his poems and his journal of the North African campaign, with his own illustrations, are being published by *Poetry, London*.

B. S.